

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 615

JC 820 172

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TITLE A Comparison of College Freshman Achievement in Remedial English Courses and in Freshman Composition Courses at a Two-Year College.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Academic Persistence; *Achievement Gains; Community Colleges; *Compensatory Education; *Remedial Instruction; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Snow College to compare the efficiency and effectiveness of college remedial courses with that of regular courses of study. The study compared the performance of 48 students in four sections of a remedial English class with that of 24 students with similar skill levels enrolled in a freshman composition course. The performance of the two groups was measured by scores on the three sub-tests of the McGraw-Hill Writing Test. A separate comparison of randomly chosen student essays from the freshman composition control group and from 12 freshman composition classes not involved in the study was made to ensure that the purposes of the freshman composition course were not being compromised to accommodate remedial students. The study revealed that: (1) there was no significant difference between the experimental and control sections on the essay criteria, indicating that the purposes of the freshman composition course had not been compromised; (2) statistically significant gains were made by the remedial students in two of the writing sub-tests, though these gains were not significantly different from those made by students in the regular freshman classes; and (3) the attrition rate was higher in the remedial courses than the regular courses. Based on the findings, it was concluded that the remedial classes did not perform the remedial function better than the regular classes. (HB)

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A COMPARISON OF COLLEGE FRESHMAN ACHIEVEMENT
IN REMEDIAL ENGLISH COURSES AND IN FRESHMAN COMPOSITION COURSES
AT A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

Roger G. Baker

Abstract:

This report is a comparison of the achievement of remedial English students in English Essentials classes and remedial eligible students in Freshman Composition classes. The comparison was made on the McGraw Hill Writing Test at a two-year college.

Students in the English Essentials classes made significant gains on the Language Mechanics and Sentence Patterns subtests but not on the Paragraph Patterns sub-test. These gains, however, were not significantly greater than the gains made by the remedial eligible students in the Freshman Composition Classes.

Research Report
Snow College
Ephraim, Utah 1982

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(Presented at the American Educational Research Association meeting,
New York, New York, 1982)

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INTRODUCTION

According to a survey conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education and published in June of 1981, (Magarrell) college remedial courses increased by 22 percent between fall of 1979 and fall of 1980. The increase in basic grammar and writing remedial courses was 29.7 percent during the same period.

This growth in college remedial classes came during a time when the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that college enrollment increased 3.2 percent (Magarrell, 1981). It was also at a time when resources for higher education seemed to be dwindling. This paradox of dwindling resources and increases in remedial instruction can't persist for long.

Even though remedial classes in the United States presently amount to only 1 percent of all courses offered at private colleges and 3 percent of all courses offered at public colleges, it seems appropriate to study the effectiveness and the efficiency of these courses in solving the remedial problem as compared to the regularly established courses of study.

It seems especially important to evaluate often expensive remedial programs as budgets get tighter. Scully (1981) noted that many colleges and universities plan to reduce or stabilize enrollments with stricter entrance requirements. The eliminated courses in many cases will be remedial in nature. This is in contrast to the 1980 growth noted earlier.

Most evaluations of remedial programs focus on the progress of students in remedial classes. Few have attempted to compare the performance of remedial students in remedial classes with remedial eligible students in standard

classes as this study attempted to do with English students.

Since 1966 there have been 32 journal articles and 52 other references cataloged in ERIC which use as descriptors remedial instruction or remedial programs/and English/and higher education or college English. None of the journal references included a comparison of remedial eligible students not in a remedial class with similar students enrolled in a remedial class.

One paper (House, 1980) presented at the thirty-first annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication compared compositions written by remedial and non-remedial college freshmen.

The House study(1980) noted that "results showed that the only characteristic that clearly distinguished between the three groups [two remedial and one standard] was the mean number of words per essay. No significant difference was found in the frequency with which any of the errors examined appeared in remedial 099 and in nonremedial 101 essays."

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Most studies of remedial English students focus on the gains they make in remedial classes (Lunsford, 1978). Such is not the case with this study. The objective of this study was to evaluate remedial English courses at a two-year college (Snow College). The achievement of students in remedial classes as measured by the McGraw-Hill Writing Test was compared to the achievement of similar students enrolled in the standard freshman composition courses at the college.

METHOD

At Snow College students who scored in the lower quartile of the McGraw-Hill Writing Test were encouraged by advisors to enroll in a remedial English class, English 51. According to the catalog, this class promotes the "development of skills in sentence and paragraph structure, spelling, punctuation and useage for students deficient in those skills." The standard freshman English course is English 101, Expository Composition. The catalog description for this course reads as follows: "Basic composition and reading emphasizing effective expository writing. Review of grammar. Weekly Themes." Students scoring in the lower quartile in the McGraw-Hill Writing Test also often appear in these English composition classes. One of the weaknesses of this study is the self-selection process that put some students in the remedial courses and others in the standard courses.

This study compared the performance of 48 students in 4 sections of a remedial English class (English 51), and 24 students with similar McGraw-Hill scores in 5 sections of freshman English Composition (English 101).

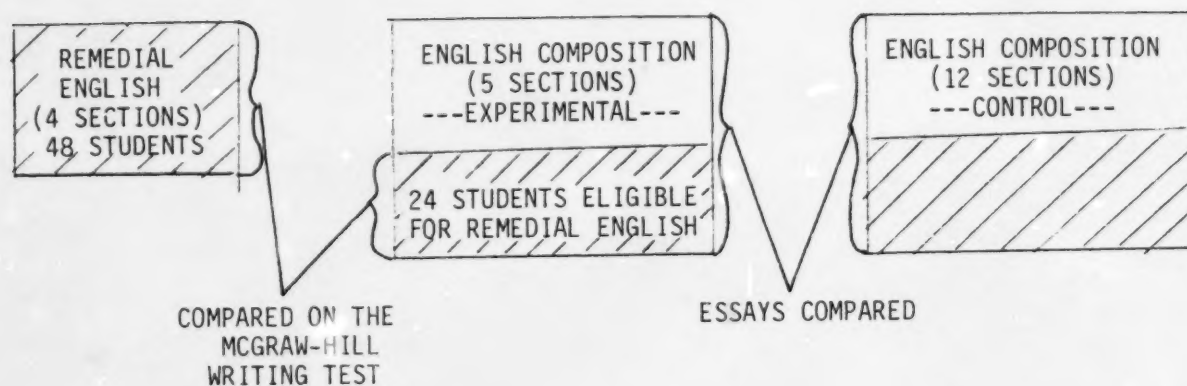
The difference between the content of the English Essentials (51) and the English Composition (101) are important. The English Essentials class teaches and gives practice in the rules of grammar, the rules of punctuation, spelling, sentence writing, and paragraph writing. The English Composition class teaches these skills only in the context of effective expository writing. The rules of grammar, punctuation and spelling are not taught explicitly except as problems are discovered in the weekly themes students are required to write. What is taught in English Composition is the organization of and effective communication through expository writing.

As a control to assure that the purposes of the English Composition (101) class were not compromised in the experiment, a standardized essay

assignment was given at the first of the class and at the end. A random sample of 26 pre- and post-essays was chosen from the 5 sections of the experimental English Composition classes and 19 pre- and post-essays were randomly selected from 12 English Compositions classes not involved in the experiment. Each composition was reviewed independently by two teachers using a standardized evaluation process developed by the English Department. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the research design.

Figure 1

Research Design



DATA SOURCE

The McGraw-Hill Writing Test has sub tests. These are: Language Mechanics, Sentence Patterns, and Paragraph Patterns. The test reports junior college norms and converts raw scores to standard scores which have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

The essay evaluation was a system devised by the English Department. Ratings were made by two individuals on each essay. One of the individuals

was a university English Professor not affiliated with Snow College. The other was a Snow College English faculty member who was on sabbatical at the time of the study.

RESULTS

A serendipitous finding was that the attrition rate in the remedial sections was 24 percent and the attrition of students eligible for remedial English but attending the English Composition classes was 14 percent. Retention of remedial students was greater in the English Composition.

Evaluation of the essays of the experimental sections of English Composition and the control sections showed statistically significant gains at the .01 level of confidence from the pre-essay to the post-essay. There was no significant difference between the experimental and control sections on the essay criteria indicating that English Composition instructors had not compromised the objective of the English Composition classes to accommodate remedial students.

Table 1

Comparison of Student Essays

Experimental Sample		Control Sample		Post-test Difference
pre-essay	post-essay	pre-essay	post-essay	
n 26	26	19	19	difference = 1.1 t=0.0886
mean 81.9	101.2	73.5	102.3	
sd 33.37	43.27	29.4	39.54	
pre/post difference Δ 19.27 t=4.168*		pre/post difference Δ 27.18 t=4.773*		

*significant at .01 level (one-tailed test)

Statistically significant gains were made by the remedial English classes on the Language Mechanics sub-test and the Sentence Patterns sub-test. There were no other statistically significant gains made by remedial eligible students in the English Composition classes even though there were slight gains.

Despite apparent gains by remedial students, on no sub-test was there a significant difference between the remedial English students and the remedial eligible students in English Composition classes.

Table 2

Remedial Students' (English 51) Scores on McGraw-Hill Writing Test

	Language Mechanics		Sentence Patterns		Paragraph Pat.		Total	
	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)
n	48	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
mean	36.6	38.7	37.3	41.4	42.6	44.6	36.2	39.5
sd	7.29	7.22	7.79	7.06	8.16	8.92	7.13	6.41
	pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.	
	$\bar{\Delta} = 2.042$ $t=1.806^*$		$\bar{\Delta} = 4.104$ $t= 3.564^*$		$\bar{\Delta}=1.958$ $t=1.580$		$\bar{\Delta}=3.270$ $t=4.202^*$	

*significant at .05 level (one-tailed test)

Table 3

Remedial Eligible Students (English 101) Scores on McGraw-Hill Writing Test

Language Mechanics			Sentence Patterns		Paragraph Pat.		Total	
	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)
n	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
mean	39.3	39.6	38.1	40.1	41.1	41.4	37.7	38.5
sd	4.78	6.06	6.38	5.98	5.79	6.28	3.31	4.40
pre/post diff.			pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.	
$\bar{\Delta} = .3333$			$\bar{\Delta} = 1.058$		$\bar{\Delta} = .2500$		$\bar{\Delta} = .7917$	
t = .2996			t = 1.294		t = .1331		t = .9231	

Table 4

McGraw-Hill Scores of All Students (Including Remedial Eligible) in English Composition

Language Mechanics			Sentence Patterns		Paragraph Pat.		Total	
	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)	Pre (B)	Post (A)
n	91	91	91	91	91	91	91	91
mean	46.4	46.3	45.7	47.3	49.5	49.8	46.2	47.0
sd	7.82	8.19	7.86	7.48	8.55	9.24	6.92	7.59
pre/post diff.			pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.		pre/post diff.	
$\bar{\Delta} = .1868$			$\bar{\Delta} = 1.615$		$\bar{\Delta} = .3297$		$\bar{\Delta} = .7802$	
t = .2568			t = 2.160*		t = .3143		t = 1.405	

*significant at .05 level (one-tailed test)

Table 5

McGraw-Hill Post-Test Score Comparisons of Remedial Students & Remedial Eligible Students in English Composition.

Remedial English(51)	Language Mechanics $\bar{x} = 38.7$	Sentence Patterns $\bar{x} = 41.4$	Paragraph Patterns $\bar{x} = 44.6$	Total $\bar{x} = 39.5$
Remedial Eligible English (101)				
Language Mechanics $\bar{x} = 39.6$	diff.=0.9 t=.5566			
Sentence Patterns $\bar{x} = 40.1$		diff.=1.3 t=.8244		
Paragraph Patterns $\bar{x} = 41.4$			diff=3.2 t=1.765	
Total $\bar{x} = 38.5$				diff=1.0 t=.7754

no significant differences

Conclusions

1. The attrition rate of remedial students was greater in the Remedial English than was the attrition rate of remedial eligible students in the Freshman Composition classes.
2. Freshman Composition teachers did not appear to compromise the objectives of the English Composition classes to accommodate remedial students. This conclusion is based on the fact that the independent essay ratings for the experimental and standard sections were not significantly different.
3. Significant gains were made in Language Mechanics and Sentence Patterns in the remedial courses, the gains were not, however, significantly different from those made by remedial eligible students in the Freshman Composition classes.

This study did not clearly demonstrate whether or not remedial English or standard Freshman Composition classes were more effective for remedial eligible students. The study did demonstrate, however, that remedial eligible students can benefit from a standard Freshman English class and can, in fact, make as much progress as a similar student in a remedial English class. It is also important to note that Freshman English teachers can accommodate the remedial students without compromising the objective of the class.

The fact that the remedial classes were not clearly superior in accomplishing the remedial function to the standard classes is an important finding which raises a question of cost vs. benefit.

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